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SENATOR BRET ALLAIN ENCOURAGES OFFICIALS TO SINK BARGE ON BAYOU CHENE TO PREVENT FLOODING

SAYS ISSUE ADDS FURTHER EMPHASIS ON NEED FOR PERMANENT FLOOD CONTROL STRUCTURE ON BAYOU CHENE

As the region braces for the potential opening of the Morganza Spillway, District 21 State Senator Bret Allain and other state officials are encouraging authorities to sink a barge on Bayou Chene to provide residents with some protection from high water currently threatening the area.

While the permanent Bayou Chene floodgate project is expected to begin construction this fall, the project isn't expected to be operational until summer 2021. In the meantime, rising waters along the Mississippi River have prompted authorities to consider opening the Morganza Spillway to alleviate the Mississippi River.

"The CPRA is in constant communication with the US Army Corps of Engineers as well as with the coastal parishes and levee districts that could be potentially impacted by high water as a result of the potential opening of the Morganza Spillway," said Chip Kline, Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority Director. "The opening of the Morganza Spillway is a federal decision and responsibility. The CPRA is working closely with GOHSEP and stands ready to assist coastal parishes in flood fighting efforts."

"This very situation is why we fought so hard to secure a commitment and funding for a permanent Bayou Chene structure," said Sen. Allain. "We are urging the barge be funded and put in place regardless of whether the spillway is opened. This would provide protection for five parishes and thousands of residents and businesses, as will the permanent structure once complete."

"Conditions are growing more critical each day," added District 17 State Senator Rick Ward. "This situation sheds further light on the fact that a permanent structure is an absolute necessity and cannot get here soon enough."

In the event a decision is made to sink the barge, it would mark the fourth time the St. Mary Levee District has done so. It was done first in 1973 and again in 2011 and 2016. Officials are holding off on doing so this year until it is clear that it is absolutely necessary as a matter of preserving resources and taxpayer dollars. The last time officials sunk a barge, it cost upwards of \$7 million. However, the district was only reimbursed by the federal government for about \$5 million.

“We are doing all of the preliminary work, meeting with contractors, and making all of the necessary preparations so that our agency will be able to move quickly if the barge sinking is funded,” said Bill Hidalgo, St. Mary Levee District President.

“The need for this permanent structure on Bayou Chene has been clear for years” said Louisiana House of Representatives District 50 Rep. Sam Jones. “I thank Governor John Bel Edwards, Senator Allain, and Senator Ward for joining with me in encouraging the installation of the temporary barge as we move forward with the permanent structure that has been funded and is in the process of being built.”

“I will be keeping a close eye on this issue as the US Army Corps of Engineers moves closer to a decision over the weekend,” said Senator Allain. “Some residents in the area are already inundated with water and health and safety concerns are growing.”

Sen. Allain added, “In the event the spillway is opened, I will be working with officials across state and local government to ensure the sinking of the barge is fully funded by federal and state sources. I would like to thank Representative Sam Jones, Senator Rick Ward, Governor John Bel Edwards, Chip Kline, Tim Matte, Bill Hidalgo, Matthew Block, and the members of the St. Mary Levee District for their tireless efforts. It is my hope that with the construction of the permanent structure, we will be better equipped to face this situation in the future.”

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